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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000988

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/PDPA/DALTON AND FOR AF/S/MRAYNOR
NSC FOR AFRICA DIRECTOR D. TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR CGURNEY
PARIS FOR CNEARY
NAIROBI FOR TPFLAUMER

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SUBJECT: GOZ SHUTS DOWN ANOTHER NEWSPAPER, COMMENCES PROSECUTION OF ANZ DIRECTORS

REF: HARARE 409 and previous

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Media and Information Commission (MIC) on June 10 cancelled the registration of The Tribune newspaper (owned by a ruling party MP), purportedly over violations of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). The GOZ on June 9 commenced its prosecution of the directors of the parent company of the two other newspapers closed by the GOZ in September.

Tribune Closed Down

¶2. (U) Prior to its shut-down by the state-appointed MIC, The Tribune was an independent weekly owned by a ruling party legislator, Mr. Kindness Paradza. It reportedly will remain closed for a year after the MIC accused the paper of changing its title, print, and ownership without the knowledge of the regulatory body. Enfeebled by under capitalization and poor advertising revenues, the newspaper's publishers - a consortium of indigenous businessmen - have vowed to challenge the closure in court.

¶3. (U) The Tribune was launched on June 1, 2002, publishing a business edition on Thursdays and a general edition on Fridays. It merged the two into a weekly that had published articles critical of GOZ human rights abuses and corruption while espousing socialist, redistributive economic policies.

¶4. (U) In his maiden speech in Parliament, Paradza had raised eyebrows by blasting AIPPA and GOZ media policies in tones uncharacteristically harsh for a ruling party MP. Earlier this year, he traveled to the United Kingdom, ostensibly to raise financial backers for his newspaper.

¶5. (U) In its June 12 front page article headlined "Expel Paradza", the state-controlled Herald reported on a provincial disciplinary committee's recommendations for Paradza's expulsion from the party. The committee reportedly charged, among other things, that Paradza had worked with the ANZ press and conducted interviews with (VOA-produced) Studio 7, a critical radio station that broadcasts negatively against the party and Government of Zimbabwe." The committee alleged further that he had been disrespectful of the party, the President, and Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, and had been critical of GOZ policy, notably AIPPA. In addition, he had "established a trail of destabilization by fanning disunity, demonizing leaders, and provoking youths to riot against leaders." Provincial party chairman Philip Chiyangwa reportedly declared that he was already preparing to select candidates to replace Paradza in a by-election.

¶6. (U) Two media watchdogs, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ), jointly condemned "the cynical and unconstitutional" closure of the "Tribune" newspaper, calling it an "onslaught against free expression." The condemnation summed up: "Instead of helping to secure the development of the media and promoting the free flow of information, MIC is busy curtailing any critical discourse in the media industry. MISA and MMPZ view the closure of the paper as a vindictive and premeditated decision to shut alternative voices in the Zimbabwe media industry ahead of next year's parliamentary elections."

Daily News Directors' AIPPA Trial Underway

¶7. (U) The Tribune becomes the third independent newspaper to be banned within a year. Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe's (ANZ) The "Daily News" and its sister weekly "The Daily News on Sunday" were forcibly shut down last September by a police raid. The raid took place one day after the Supreme Court, observing that the publications

had yet to register under AIPPA, declined to rule on the newspapers' claim that AIPPA was unconstitutional.

18. (U) The trial of ANZ and its four directors over alleged violations of AIPPA and contempt of court commenced on June 9. The case stems from the publication of an issue of The Daily News in October following an Administrative Court decision in ANZ's favor. The MIC asserted that the decision would only have permitted publication after November 30, when the decision said ANZ's registration would be deemed effective if the MIC failed to register it.

19. (SBU) ANZ counsel told poloff on June 14 that the court has adjourned and is not scheduled to reconvene on the case until July 12. She reported that the prosecution was "winging it" and had yet to submit a full list of witnesses. She noted that the individual defendants each faced a fine of USD 56 and/or up to two years in prison.

Comment

10. (SBU) The GOZ's no-holds-barred war against all independent information sources shows no signs of abating. Paradza's demonization demonstrates once again that the ruling party often is harder on critics inside its family than on those outside. It further underscores the hazards of fraternization with the enemy: Paradza was publicly fingered as a party enemy not after criticizing AIPPA (other ZANU-PF members had as well) but after traveling to the UK. Finally, Paradza's straits underscore the continuing dominance of Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, who increasingly is targeting ruling party colleagues and fueling witch-hunt atmospherics within the party. Chiyangwa's action against Paradza is both ironic and instructive on the ephemeral nature of success and failure within the party: he has been relatively rehabilitated (albeit chastened) after spending weeks in jail as the first victim of the GOZ's ongoing corruption campaign.